

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form  
George L. Seaton House  
Alexandria, Virginia  
Multiple Property Listing: African American Historic Resources of Alexandria, Virginia

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NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1204-0018  
(Rev. 10-90)  
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

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### 1. Name of Property

historic name George Lewis Seaton House  
other names: NA; site number: DHR #100-5015-0007

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### 2. Location

street & number 404 South Royal Street not for publication N/A city or town Alexandria  
vicinity N/A state Virginia code VA county Alexandria (Independent City) code 510  
zip code 22314

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### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination        request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets        does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  
       nationally        statewide X locally. (        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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Signature of certifying official

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Date

### Virginia Department of Historic Resources

In my opinion, the property        meets        does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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Signature of commenting or other official

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Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
       entered in the National Register  
       See continuation sheet.  
       determined eligible for the National Register -  
       See continuation sheet.  
       determined not eligible for the National Register

Signature of Keeper

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\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**Alexandria, Virginia**

**Multiple Property Listing: African American Historic Resources of Alexandria, Virginia**

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**5. Classification**

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) African American Historic Resources of Alexandria, Virginia

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

roof METAL

walls BRICK

other \_\_\_\_\_

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**Alexandria, Virginia**

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☒ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☒ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black

ARCHAEOLOGY: HISTORIC NON-ABORIGINAL

**Period of Significance** ca. 1795-1881

**Significant Dates** N/A

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

George Lewis Seaton

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** Unknown

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography** (See footnotes in Architectural Description and Statement of Significance sections of this form.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

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**Alexandria, Virginia**

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**Primary Location of Additional Data**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acres of Property** 1,300 square feet

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**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing

1 18 322490 4296660

3

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Zone Easting Northing

2

\_\_\_

4

\_\_\_

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Alexandria, VA: Map 74.04, Block 07, Lot 04.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the entire city lot historically associated with the Seatons' ownership of the property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Elizabeth Calvit for the Office of Historic Alexandria

organization City of Alexandria, Office of Historic Alexandria date August 1994

Revised by Pamela Cressey, Francine Bromberg and Steven Shephard, November 2001

street & number Box 178 City Hall telephone 703-838-4554

city or town Alexandria state VA zip code 22313

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

Summary Description

The Seaton House is located at 404 S. Royal Street in the heart of “Hayti,” the second oldest African American neighborhood in Alexandria. The house is a three-bay, two-story, side-hall-plan brick rowhouse. It is possible that the structure was originally constructed between 1861 and 1866, just before its purchase by George Seaton on April 14, 1866. An examination of the Alexandria tax records between 1820 and 1907 has revealed that the greatest increase in the value of the property occurred between 1861 and 1866. During this five-year period, the values of the other houses on the 400 block of South Royal Street remained constant or increased a few hundred dollars, while the property at 404 South Royal more than tripled in value from \$400 to \$1500.<sup>1</sup> This increase suggests that there was a substantial improvement to the property, and it is clear from the G.M. Hopkins Insurance map for Alexandria that a brick house with rear frame additions was present on the property in 1877. However, it is likely that there was a substantial modification to or rebuilding of the structure around the turn of the century. Tax records for the property indicate that the house and lot were valued at \$800 in 1880, decreased in value to \$600 by 1885, and rebounded to an \$800 value by 1902.

Since the value of several other properties on the block remained constant from 1880 to 1907, it is probable that the condition of the house was deteriorating at the end of nineteenth century and that substantial modification or rebuilding, at least of the front section, occurred around 1900. Evidence of these alterations is also apparent from an examination of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century insurance maps, for the 1896 Sanborn shows a three-story section of the front portion of the house, while the 1907 map depicts a two-story dwelling.

Detailed Description

The west facade of the Seaton House, the only one visible from the street, is of red-painted pressed brick in a running bond pattern. The low-pitched shed roof is covered in standing-seam metal and slopes to the rear. The house has one-over-one sash wood windows with decorative brick segmental arches. Arches above the windows and door display carving. Also above the front door is a transom. The building facade’s most distinctive feature is the decorative pressed brick detailing on the facade, which is topped by a seven-course corbelled brick cornice. The south side of the facade contains a ground-level opening, commonly known in Alexandria as a “horse alley”, with a gate for pedestrian access to the rear yard. The exposed wall within the alley is of common brick. The wrought-metal gate is composed of eight thin, vertical, metal rods, and three horizontal rods. The entrance to the house features a brick stoop of three steps and a plain, black, metal railing. The wooden front door has a single, large, oval pane of glass.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandria Tax Records, 1820, 1825, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1845, 1850, 1855, 1861, 1866, 1870, 1872, 1875, 1880, 1891, 1895, 1902 and 1907.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

### Section 7 Page 2

The house was recently renovated, with new windows added that are appropriate for the period. Other alterations have been made to the interior and rear sections of the house.

#### Interior Description

This two-story, brick, rowhouse was originally a two-room-deep side-hall-plan building with a narrow ell on the rear for a kitchen. The house retains its three-foot-square entry vestibule with shutters and ransom over the exterior door. A contemporary sandblasted glass door on the interior of the vestibule retains the original transom but has new Victorian-period symmetrically moulded trim with corner blocks. The flooring in the entry hall is 1x2 tongue-and-groove heart pine. The flooring in the parlor and dining area, consisting of 1x4 pine boards, appears to be a replacement. The walls between the entry hall, parlor, and dining area have been removed to create a common open space.

Ghost marks on the floor indicate the wall location of the original side-hall and double-parlor plan. Two masonry fire boxes, which were previously corner fireplaces with a shared flue, now stand back-to-back at 45 degree angles in the center of the south wall. The design and construction of both mantels are typical of the Victorian period. The present owner notes that the mantel in the dining room was relocated from the parlor and the parlor mantel is a newly installed antique, not original to the house.

The straight-run staircase is in its original location, but the side wall has been removed to display an open Colonial Revival-style balustrade and spiral volute at the newel. Treads and risers have also been replaced. The doors throughout are 6-panel late-twentieth-century replacements.

The plaster has been removed from the party wall on the north side to expose the brick. The other walls are still plaster or drywall, as is the ceiling. The dining area ceiling is dropped approximately one foot with a 45-degree bevel around the perimeter. The new Victorian-style trim with corner blocks framing the windows was milled to match the original. The chandelier is a gaslight reproduction with a plaster ceiling medallion. The ceiling in the kitchen is roughly two feet lower than the first-floor rooms in the front of the house. The second-floor plan matches the original first-floor plan and has the original 2 1/4"-wide tongue-and-groove heart-pine flooring.

#### Archaeological Description

This property is registered as an archaeological site with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources as 44AX157. Alexandria Archaeology conducted an investigation in July 1991 as a result of the City of Alexandria's Archaeological Protection Code.<sup>2</sup> The owners of the house at that time planned to construct a small enclosure between the front section of the house and the rear addition. Two small archaeological test units were excavated in this area, one measuring 4 by 3 feet and the other a two-foot square (Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup>Alexandria Archaeology, Notes and Collections, Alexandria, Virginia, 1991.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 7 Page 3**

The excavations yielded eleven soil levels extending to a depth of about 3 feet below the existing ground surface. Archaeologists have recovered over 2000 artifacts (ceramics, glass, building materials, etc.) and food remains from the site dating back to the late eighteenth century. The uppermost level, a late twentieth-century deposit about .2 feet in thickness, rested upon two nineteenth-century layers (with a total thickness of about half a foot) containing primarily clinkers, the refuse from burning coal. These in turn lay on top of three levels, deposited as early as the mid-nineteenth century. The lowest of the three levels was a layer of oyster shell, which did not seem to be a midden deposit but appeared to have been purposefully put in place for use as a walkway. The shells rested upon a .2-foot thick gravel layer, deposited sometime after 1830, which may have helped provide drainage for the overlying walkway. Underlying the gravel was a clay level about a foot in thickness which contained artifacts dated to the 1820s. The archaeological assemblages from the lowest three levels of the site indicated that they had been deposited between 1795 and 1820. One of these deeply buried layers was a rich trash midden yielding over 100 sherds of creamware and pearlware along with over 150 bone fragments. Other features discovered during the excavation include two intrusive modern utility trenches, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century construction or utility trench, and a square post hole dating to the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**CONTINUATION SHEET**  
**Section 8 Page 4**

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The significance of the property at 404 South Royal Street stems from its association with George Lewis Seaton, a successful African American entrepreneur and property owner as well as a civic and political leader in Alexandria throughout the mid-nineteenth century and from the fact that it has yielded a sequence of archaeological deposits which reflects the development of the community once known as "Hayti." The Hayti (pronounced hay-tie) neighborhood was established in the early 1800s around the 400 block of South Royal Street and was the home of many black leaders. Haiti, site of the only successful slave uprising in the western hemisphere, inspired the name for this free African American neighborhood. Quakers supported the growth of Hayti by renting and selling property to free black families. In fact, the block on which the Seaton's lived was associated with free black families prior to 1810. Archaeological work by Alexandria Archaeology at 404 South Royal Street has led to the discovery of artifacts which relate to the occupants of the site from this early period. These may represent the earliest record of material culture for free blacks in Alexandria.

George Seaton purchased the property at 404 South Royal Street in the heart of Hayti in 1866. Well regarded by blacks and whites alike, Seaton was described as a "respectable and well to do resident of this city"<sup>3</sup> in a local newspaper article in 1867. Born free in Alexandria in 1822, Seaton is perhaps best known for his work as a master carpenter and as the builder of a number of homes and civic buildings in Alexandria during the 1850s and 1860s. His business dealings also included the management of a thriving grocery store near the center of town. A list of his considerable civic accomplishments, achieved under restrictive conditions, includes many positions that illustrate his leadership in the community. An outspoken Radical Republican after the Civil War, Seaton associated himself with many movements for racial improvement, and in 1869 was elected the first African American member of the Virginia General Assembly from north of the Rappahannock River. He served as head trustee of the First Free School Society of Alexandria and constructed two schools for African American children in the city. In addition, he was a founding member of the Colored Building Association and the Colored YMCA. He was not only active in the establishment of the Odd Fellows Society, but also constructed the Odd Fellows Hall for use by the organization.

The property at 404 South Royal Street served as Seaton's home from the early 1870s until his death in 1881. While the house was modified around 1900, his widow continued to live there until 1927. The alterations to the house after Seaton's death attest to both the resilience of his family and the continuing strength of their ties to the Hayti community. Given Seaton's involvement in and commitment to the betterment of Alexandria's African American citizens, it is not surprising that he and his family decided to settle in this neighborhood, and it is fitting for this house in the heart of Hayti to serve now as a tribute to Seaton and as a reminder of his contributions to the city during the mid-nineteenth century.

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3 Alexandria Gazette May 2, 1867.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

### Section 8 Page 5

#### Historical Background

##### *The Early Land History: A Lot in Hayti*

The property at 404 S. Royal Street was part of a larger parcel of land (the northern half of the block bounded by Fairfax, Wilkes, Royal and Wolfe Streets) auctioned by the City trustees to John Orr in 1763 and owned by William Hartshorne, a Quaker, by 1785.<sup>4</sup> Like other members of Alexandria's Quaker community, Hartshorne aided in the development of free black communities by renting property to African Americans, and he constructed a house on the property for this purpose. Although the exact construction date and location of the house are not known, it probably faced Royal Street in the vicinity of the lot at 404 S. Royal. The house was occupied by Ben Dawson, a laborer, and Elizabeth Dice, a seamstress, sometime before 1810.<sup>5</sup>

Although archaeological work on the site was very limited and confined to a small area of proposed construction disturbance, the investigation yielded material remains related to this early free black occupation of the site. The earliest deposits recovered date from about 1795 to 1820, the period of Hartshorne's ownership. The deeply buried midden discovered during the excavation may thus relate to occupation of the site by Dawson and Dice, Hartshorne's earliest known lessees, in the early nineteenth century. The artifacts may represent the earliest record of material culture for free blacks in Alexandria and provide tangible evidence of the early development of the free African American community known as Hayti along a corridor of Royal Street extending from Duke to Wilkes streets.

By 1815, ownership of much of Hartshorne's property on the block had been transferred to Mordecai Miller, another Quaker, who continued to aid in fostering the development of Hayti through the practice of renting and selling to African Americans.<sup>6</sup> By 1820, the property at 404 S. Royal Street definitely had a house situated on it, and Miller leased the structure to free African Americans. Michael Morris lived on the lot in 1820,<sup>7</sup> Betsy Marple was there in 1825, and William Dogan leased it in 1835.<sup>8</sup> By 1850, Miller had sold the property to Betsy Duvall, a housekeeper.<sup>9</sup> Several members of the Dogan family (Governor, a laborer, and George, who worked as a laborer and then became an apprentice butcher) continued to live on the site with Duvall until at least 1855.<sup>10</sup> In 1861, Duvall rented space to George Douglass, a ship caulker, and Andrew Bell,<sup>11</sup> and in 1866 she sold the property to George Seaton.<sup>12</sup>

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4 T.B. McCord, Jr., Across the Fence, but a World Apart: The Coleman Site, 1796-1907, Alexandria Archaeology Publications, Number 126, Alexandria, Virginia, 1985, p. 12.

5 Ibid., p. 14.

6 Ibid., p. 78.

7 Alexandria Tax Records, 1820.

8 McCord, 1985, p. 80, 81.

9 Ibid., p. 82.

10 Ibid., p. 81, 82.

11 Alexandria Tax Records, 1861; 1860 census.

12 Alexandria Deed Book Y3, 530.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**  
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The archaeological resources recovered from the upper levels of the excavation give us additional insight into the lives of Hayti's nineteenth-century residents. The thick clay level contains glass, ceramics and clay pipe fragments that may have been used by Michael Morris, and the walkway could have been constructed by Morris or Marple. The mid-nineteenth century levels contain artifacts that may relate to the households of Betsy Duvall and the Dogans as well as Duvall's other lessees. The 3-foot-thick deposit of eleven soil layers, perhaps going back into the late eighteenth century, provide a record of the continuing development of the Hayti neighborhood throughout the nineteenth century, and the artifacts and features recovered provide a physical connection with the free African Americans who lived and worked in the community.

*The Seaton Connection*

George Lewis Seaton was the oldest son of George Seaton and Lucinda Seaton. Lucinda was a dower slave of George and Martha Washington, who freed her while she was still an infant.<sup>13</sup> Seaton's father was a free black master carpenter and builder who had once been a tenant at Burgundy Farm in Fairfax County.<sup>14</sup> When George Seaton, Sr., died in 1844, he left his five properties (four of which had been rented to whites) on Franklin and South Washington streets to his family. George L. Seaton acquired one of these parcels near the northeast corner of South Washington and Franklin streets upon his father's death.<sup>15</sup> Seaton married Maria Bryant of Loudoun County by 1847, and they had six children by the end of the 1850s.<sup>16</sup> After Maria's death, Seaton married Catherine Turley in 1874, and they had two sons.<sup>17</sup>

George L. Seaton became a master carpenter like his father and is best known in Alexandria for his buildings and entrepreneurial real estate dealings. He began his house building career in his 20s working with his brother, Adolphus.<sup>18</sup> In 1851 at age 29, Seaton purchased a corner lot at Wolfe and St. Asaph streets from a former mayor, John Roberts. He built a structure with a Greek Revival facade fronting two earlier buildings, which is now 323 South St. Asaph Street. The newspaper announced the completion of the building in April 1852: "A large frame building corner St. Asaph and Wolfe for George Seaton - built by him."<sup>19</sup> A permit was granted for a pipe to bring water from the new water

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13 Peter Bernstein, *The Life and Times of George Lewis Seaton*, p. 3, 2000, ms. On file, Alexandria Archaeology Museum. Elsa S. Rosenthal, *1790 Names-1970 Faces, A Short History of Alexandria's Slave and Free Black Community*. In, *Alexandria A Composite History*, p. 83, edited by E. Hambleton and M. Van Landingham, Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, 1975.

14 1820 Ledger of James Hewitt Hooe, Fairfax Archives, Fairfax City, Va.

15 Peter Bernstein, p.3.

16 Provine, Dorothy, *Alexandria County, Virginia, Free Negro Registers, 1797-1861*, p. 211, Heritage Books, 1990. U.S. Census, 1850. Peter Bernstein, pp. 5, 7. *Alexandria City and County Census, 1860*.

17 Peter Bernstein, p. 15.

18 Peter Bernstein, p. 5.

19 *Alexandria Gazette*, April 3, 1852; Penny Morrill, *Who Built Alexandria? Architects in Alexandria, 1750-1900*, p. 32, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, 1979.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**  
**Section 8 Page 7**

system in June, and by August, the house had been rented to R. S. Huck.<sup>20</sup> This structure, described by architectural historians as being typical for its time, is admired for its “fine woodwork, combined with a side hall plan and the generous use of windows which bring light to this spacious home,”<sup>21</sup> and displays Seaton's understanding of architectural styles, and his excellent craftsmanship. It is interesting to note that Quakers, who had such strong ties to Alexandria's free African American community, occupied much of the 300 block of South St. Asaph Street for the first half of the nineteenth-century, and their meeting house was just across Wolfe Street from this new Seaton-built house. Seaton was still listed as owner of the St. Asaph Street house in 1854, when the property was valued at \$2000. However, at this time, the Seatons lived in a smaller house valued at \$900 on South Washington Street near his mother's home, interestingly valued at \$2300, which was more than the new house Seaton had constructed.<sup>22</sup>

Seaton's real estate and construction enterprises continued to flourish throughout the 1860s. The Alexandria Deed Records and the local newspaper contain numerous references to his activities, which reflect his role in the development of Alexandria's communities. In 1864, he purchased a lot at the corner of Washington and Wolfe streets at a sale that resulted from the tax debts incurred by Confederates who had left the area.<sup>23</sup> In 1866, he built a frame house at Duke and Washington streets<sup>24</sup> and another at 419 Alfred Street.<sup>25</sup> He also rented out a large frame house at 59 South St. Asaph Street.<sup>26</sup> On April 14, 1868, Seaton purchased a lot at 3400 Russell Road, constructed a house on it, and rented it to tenants.<sup>27</sup>

Seaton purchased the property nominated to the National Register at 404 South Royal Street for \$1,675 in 1866.<sup>28</sup> Tax records indicate that a brick house was probably constructed on this lot just prior to Seaton's purchase, sometime between 1861 and 1866.<sup>29</sup> During the first few years of his ownership Seaton rented

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20 Virginia-America Water Company Records, Permit #50, June 26, 1852 and August 1, 1852.

21 Ruth Lincoln Kaye, cited in Peter Bernstein, pp. 5-6.

22 Peter Bernstein, p. 6. Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Records, 1854.

23 Peter Bernstein, p. 7. Alexandria Deed Book V3, 552.

24 Peter Bernstein, p. 7. Alexandria Gazette, February 28, 1866.

25 Peter Bernstein, p. 13.

26 Peter Bernstein, p. 13. Alexandria Gazette, November 13, 1868.

27 Ibid.

28 Alexandria Deed Book Y3, 530

29 Alexandria Tax Records, 1820, 1825, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1845, 1850, 1855, 1861, 1866, 1870, 1872, 1875, 1880, 1885, 1891, 1895, 1902, and 1907.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**  
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this house out to tenants,<sup>30</sup> and in 1869, when it was occupied by the Tancils, another African American family, a small fire broke out and destroyed some of the furniture in the home.<sup>31</sup> George Seaton and his family moved into the house sometime around 1871, and it served as Seaton's home until his death in 1881.<sup>32</sup> His widow, Catherine, continued to live on the property until her death in 1927.<sup>33</sup> While substantial modification or rebuilding of the house took place around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is clear that the property was associated with the Seaton family for over 60 years, from 1866 until 1927.

Seaton's training as a master carpenter gave him important skills that provided him an opportunity to exercise a leadership role in literally building up Alexandria's African American neighborhoods. In addition to the construction of residences, Seaton is credited with constructing a number of civic structures important to the city's black communities. He is perhaps best remembered for his contribution to the education of the city's African Americans as the builder of two schools for black children after the Civil War. Under Seaton's leadership, a group of African Americans established the Free School Society of Alexandria. Working with the Freedmen's Bureau, the society obtained land for the schools and the materials to build them, and Seaton received a commission to construct them. The Seaton School for boys (later known as the Snowden School) was completed in April 1867, and the Hallowell School for girls opened in the following November.<sup>34</sup> With the completion of the first school, Seaton spoke at the opening ceremony for the city's Public Free School system, held at the First Colored Baptist Church in 1867. Addressing a public audience for the first time, Seaton claimed to have felt compelled to make a statement; he commented on the difficulty he had in obtaining an education and expressed his excitement about the increasing opportunities for African Americans.<sup>35</sup> The two wood-frame structures built by Seaton became part of the city's public school system in 1870.

Although both were eventually demolished, the Snowden School continued in use until a fire forced its closing in 1915 and the Hallowell School served the community until 1922.<sup>36</sup>

Although not related to education, the Odd Fellows Hall is another important civic landmark built by Seaton and associated with the city's African American community. Seaton helped to establish the Colored Odd Fellows, a fraternal organization, and served as the chairman of the Odd Fellows trustees.<sup>37</sup> Seaton was also responsible for enlarging an existing building at 411 South Columbus Street

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30 Alexandria Tax Records, 1870.

31 Alexandria Gazette, December 8, 1869.

32 Alexandria Tax Records, 1872, 1875, 1880. Alexandria Gazette, July 1, 1881.

33 Peter Bernstein, p. 17. Corporation & Circuit Courts, Alexandria, Virginia, Catherine Seaton, Inventory of Estate, May 26, 1927, Will Book 4, p. 40.

34 Peter Bernstein, p. 11.

35 Peter Bernstein, pp. 3, 11. Alexandria Gazette, January 1, 1871.

36 Peter Bernstein, p. 11.

37 Peter Bernstein, p. 15. Alexandria Gazette, August 4, 1875. T. Michael Miller, The Odd Fellows Hall, ms on file at Alexandria Library, 1984.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**  
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and completing the Odd Fellows Hall with funds from the Freedmen's Bureau in 1870. Situated in the African American Bottoms neighborhood of Alexandria, the hall was used from the date of its completion until recent times as the site for numerous gatherings and secret fraternal affairs.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to his real estate and construction businesses, George Seaton served as a grocer.<sup>39</sup> He advertised the opening of his grocery at 179 King Street in 1868:

Having bought the stock of Messrs. Loomis & Facer No. 179 King Street, I am now prepared to furnish to my friends and the public in general, as fine a selection of GROCERIES as can be found in any house in the city.<sup>40</sup>

By 1873, Seaton had moved the grocery to 94 South Royal Street,<sup>41</sup> and by 1876, two of his sons were serving as clerks in the store.<sup>42</sup> He is reported to have controlled a significant portion of the grocery trade in the city.<sup>43</sup>

Through his business dealings, George Seaton became a wealthy man. His real estate holdings grew from an aggregate value of \$500 in 1850 to \$4000 ten years later;--only 100 other Virginia blacks had comparable holdings.<sup>44</sup> By 1870, his real estate holdings were valued at \$15,000, and his personal savings totaled \$12,000.<sup>45</sup> An 1867 article in the Alexandria Gazette cited him as a "respectable and well to do citizen of this city."<sup>46</sup>

George Seaton's leadership did not revolve merely around his business activities. With the end of the Civil War, there were many opportunities for his skills to be used in the civic and political arenas. During Reconstruction, blacks were given the vote and the right to hold office. The Republican Party sought out members from this new voting population. Since the majority of Virginia whites identified with the Conservative or Democratic party, most blacks became associated with the Radical or Republican Party. George Seaton and his brother John Andrew became active members of the Republican Club called the Fourth Ward Radicals, which had both black and white members. Both

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38 Peter Bernstein, p. 16. T. Michael Miller, 1984.

39 Peter Bernstein, p. 15.

40 Alexandria Gazette, June 18, 1868. Peter Bernstein, p. 15.

41 Alexandria City Directory, 1870. Peter Bernstein, p. 15

42 Alexandria City Directory, 1876-1877. Peter Bernstein, p. 15.

43 Peter Bernstein, p. 15.

44 Alexandria City and County Census, 1860; Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South: 1790-1915*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago, 1990, p. 125.

45 Alexandria Census, 1870. Peter Bernstein, p. 13.

46 Alexandria Gazette, May 16, 1867. Peter Bernstein, p. 9.



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men were elected to the executive committee in September 1867,<sup>47</sup> and John Seaton was eventually elected Fourth Ward alderman, becoming the first African American elected to the Alexandria council.<sup>48</sup> George's political aspirations carried him even farther—to the state level. He attended a Radical Republican state convention in August 1867,<sup>49</sup> and in 1869 was elected to the Virginia General Assembly for two years. The highest ranking black officeholder in the state at that time, he was aptly appointed to two standing committees,<sup>50</sup> the Committee of Schools and Colleges, where he could emphasize his commitment to African American education, and the Committee on Banks, Currency and Commerce, where he could utilize his business expertise. While participating in the local Radical Republican meetings, George became identified with those wanting racial harmony. The Alexandria Gazette reported on one meeting and the resolution of those attending:

In view of repeated representations made, by parties interested, to prevent the establishment of relations of amity and good feeling between the white and colored people of the city, the following preamble and resolutions were offered and unanimously accepted. Whereas, the report has been very extensively circulated that we, the colored people of Alexandria, are being taught to hate the white citizens, whom we have always lived among, therefore, Resolved, That we, the colored citizens, regard the report as base and false, and that in the future, as in the past, we shall do all in our power to cultivate the best of feelings towards the white citizens, trusting that the same may be done on their part toward us.<sup>51</sup>

In other meetings, Seaton stressed getting African Americans to vote and insuring education for the city's black children.<sup>52</sup>

Besides his political activities, Seaton took on many active leadership roles in local African American organizations. In addition to serving as the founder of the Free School Society and head trustee of the Odd Fellows, he was responsible for the formation of many civic groups in Alexandria including the Colored Building Association, where he served as a trustee, and the Colored YMCA, where he served as president in 1873. Seaton was a member of Alfred Street Baptist Church, the oldest African American congregation in the city. In 1871, he donated a flagpole that was placed on the engine house of the Columbia Fire Company. He also demonstrated his leadership abilities in 1872 when he chaired a meeting to request that a Freedmen's Savings Bank branch be opened in Alexandria. Seaton and his to

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47 Alexandria Gazette, September 10, 1867.

48 Officialdom: 1749-1992, Heritage Books, Inc. 1992.

49 Alexandria Gazette, August 6, 1867.

50 Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia for the Session of 1869-70, February 9, 1870, 53-54, Virginia Historical Society. Peter Bernstein, p. 13.

51 Alexandria Gazette, July 23, 1867.

52 Alexandria Gazette, October 20, 1872.

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brother John, an important African American leader and businessman in his own right, chaired a meeting honor the memory of Senator Charles Sumner, who was murdered in 1875.

George Seaton's health began to decline in the mid-1870s. He was listed as an invalid in Alexandria's 1880 census. An article in the local paper a year later stated that "George L. Seaton, well-known and respected colored man, was stricken for the third time with paralysis while at his home on Royal Street, yesterday afternoon. He is extremely ill, and no hopes are entertained of his recovery."<sup>53</sup> Seaton died three days later, on July 5, 1881.<sup>54</sup>

George L. Seaton was an important African American in his community, and in Alexandria. A free black businessman and builder prior to the Civil War, he rose to prominence with the end of the hostilities. His considerable leadership skills enabled him to build up the city's African American neighborhoods by continuing to build residences and community structures and by participating fully in numerous civic and political activities. He took an active role in the formation of many African American civic organizations. He also participated at the local and state level in politics, serving the African American community after the Civil War. He supported black education and actually constructed the schools used by the African American community for more than fifty years.

The house at 404 South Royal Street stands today as a reminder of Seaton's contributions to the city of Alexandria. The property was associated with Seaton and his family for over sixty years. It is noteworthy that the house, situated on the 400 block of South Royal Street, stands in what was the heart of Hayti, one of Alexandria's earliest African American neighborhoods, which was developed in large part because of by Quaker land sales to African Americans. The house takes on added significance because of this location. In fact, the block on which the Seaton's lived was associated with free black families prior to 1810, and archaeological work by Alexandria Archaeology at 404 South Royal Street has led to the discovery of artifacts that relate to the occupants of the site from this early period. These may represent the earliest record of material culture for free blacks in Alexandria. Given Seaton's status as one of the pillars of the African American community after the Civil War, it is not surprising that he and his family decided to settle in this neighborhood, and it is fitting for this house to serve now as a tribute to one of Alexandria's leading African American citizens.

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53 Morrill, *Who Built Alexandria?*, 32.

54 *Alexandria Gazette*, July 5, 1881. Peter Bernstein, p. 17.



**CONTINUATION SHEET**  
**Section PHOTO Page 13**

All photographs are of:

**SEATON HOUSE**  
Alexandria, Virginia  
VDHR File Number: 100-5015-0007  
Elizabeth Calvit, exterior photographs  
Kristin B. Lloyd, interior photographs

All negatives are stored in the archives of the Department of Historic Resources in Richmond, Virginia.

DATE: April 1994  
VIEW OF: facade  
NEG. NO.: 19171: 9  
PHOTO 1 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: kitchen, looking west  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 14  
PHOTO 8 OF 10

DATE: July 1994  
VIEW OF: facade detail  
NEG. NO.: 19170: 17  
PHOTO 2 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: transom over main entrance, looking west  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 4  
PHOTO 9 OF 10

DATE: July 1994  
VIEW OF: facade detail  
NEG. NO.: 19170: 18  
PHOTO 3 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: dining room, dropped ceiling  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 18  
PHOTO 10 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: stairway from 1st to 2nd floor, north side of building  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 7  
PHOTO 4 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: 1st floor, living room, looking west  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 16  
PHOTO 5 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: parlor fireplace, angled out from south wall  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 19  
PHOTO 6 OF 10

DATE: November 15, 1995  
VIEW OF: dining room fireplace, angled out from south wall  
NEG. NO.: 19028: 9  
PHOTO 7 OF 10